

B Epi 02

15 January 2006

RCL 1 Corinthians 6.11-20

My Way or Yahweh?

Several years ago I was visiting one of my favorite places on the planet, Zion National Park in southern Utah. That canyon is stunningly beautiful and speaks to my soul. I was having lunch in a hole in the wall just outside the gates of the park and being an unwilling eavesdropper on a conversation at the next table. Sitting there were an older couple and a younger man, perhaps in his midthirties. He was expensively dressed with lots of flashy jewelry (that was the era of the gold chains, the more the merrier). I remembered that on our way in we had passed a very expensive car in the parking lot. He was doing most of the talking. He had one of those voices that cuts through everything and was speaking loud enough that one could not not-hear what he was saying. He was arrogant and self-centered; every other word was I, me, mine. He was detailing his exploits in business, how much money he was making (he admitted to no mistakes or bad luck). He complained bitterly about the poor and what a drag they were on his ability to make and keep money. He resented social security taxes, workers' compensation, county hospitals, medicare – all the programs in which our society cares for those who cannot care for themselves. He saw all this only as thieves reaching into his pocket to steal legally what was rightfully his. He exhibited no sense of community, of the greater caring for the lesser, of the duty toward the less fortunate than the more fortunate have. He had no sense that what he owned was merely on loan from the God who truly owned everything, no sense of using God's resources for the benefit of others as well as himself, no sense that at death he would have to give it all up and answer for its use. He was a bankrupt soul.

He is a perfect example of what Saint Paul is talking about in today's reading from First Corinthians (6.11-20). The city of Corinth was a large metropolitan port, much like Los Angeles/Long Beach. The church in that city reflected the makeup of the population: people of all sorts and experiences, people wounded by life, trying to find a way of living that made living worthwhile. That's why they were Christians. Their starving souls were fed by the message of God's forgiveness and love centered on a crucified Carpenter from Galilee. But they had misinterpreted part of the message. Paul had taught them the great freedom from anxiety that came from knowing that God loved them without reservation, no matter what they had done, that all that was wrong in human life was forgiven in the Love crucified on the cross and resurrected from the tomb. Paul taught them that God did not love them because they kept the rules but because He was by nature a Lover and they could trust that love. From this, they wrongly concluded that it didn't matter what they did. They had genitals, so they could have

sex indiscriminately. They had stomachs, so they could eat without limit. The implication was that there was nothing that they could not do.

Paul was horrified at their misunderstanding. What they had missed, he said, was that they had been taken up into something incredibly greater than themselves, that they lived for something beyond themselves. The correct way to judge the proper use of genitals, stomach, and everything else in human life was how that use contributed to relationship with God and to relationship with God's children, with one another. Humankind in Jesus has been raised to a new level of existence. In some mysterious fashion we have become part of God Himself by becoming part of Christ's mystical resurrected body: "Don't you know that your bodies are part of the body of Christ?... Anyone who is joined to the Lord is one in spirit with him." (Vs 15, 17) There is another standard of behavior than the one we might get from looking at just the natural. That standard is the supernatural, the way that God Herself looks at our lives and our reality. God cares enough about our welfare to die for us, and we are called to the same standard.

Indiscriminate sex coarsens the person who engages in it and wounds the partner who is just an object rather than a person. God wants a better relationship than that. Indiscriminate eating damages the glutton as well as taking away food from those who don't have enough. God wants a better relationship than that. Indulging our anger hurts ourself and everyone who hears our anger. Holding on to our money, time, and energy impoverishes us. God wants better than that. Using the energies of our lives only for ourself is directly counter to the model we see in the Man-God hanging on the cross. Jesus could have escaped that fate, could have fled in the night, could have valued His natural life above His relationship with God His Father. But He did it right and showed us the way. He placed all that He was, natural and supernatural, into what God His Father wanted to accomplish, even to death. It is that right relationship that God confirms in Jesus by raising Him from death. Jesus' resurrection says to us and to the world, "Jesus got it right. Do what He does. Don't regard only your own benefit. Look at those to whom you belong, every other human being, the communion of those whom God has chosen by bringing them into this world. This is the proper use of your body and soul, the proper use of your life."

That is not an easy lesson to learn or to keep. We keep backsliding into selfishness. At least, I do. I keep wanting to hoard my money, my time, my energy to myself, for myself. I keep having to pry my hand open to give away what short-sighted human nature wants to keep. I have to keep reminding myself that God's nature is better than my nature, and that God has made me a part of Himself.

What are the lessons we take home with us today? One is that we should always keep our glory as God's children front and center. We have been taken into the mystery that is Jesus; He

is in us and we are in Him. When we contemplate doing something, we should know that Jesus will be doing that action in us. Is it worthy of Him? Is it something that will survive the judgment of God when we die? Will we be glad to admit to God that we did that, or will God have to burn it out of our soul before we enter into heaven? Will God recognize Jesus in our actions? Another lesson is to go to those places and do those things that feed your soul, your relationship with the God who is always calling us out of ourself into Himself and into others. I'm planning another trip to Zion National Park soon. The final lesson is to keep your voice low when you're talking in restaurants.